

Introduction

[The Velvet Underground – Train Round the Bend]

This story tells the tale of me, a daily user of the Israeli train system.

Although every day on the train railways is fascinating in its own way, today was special.

It started when I got up slightly too late, and was almost late. I left at around 8.03, while I normally leave at 7.55 (the train leaves at 8.15). It continued when the way to the station was blocked (who blocks a pavement?), so I had to make a detour. I was sure I was going to be late, but as usual I underestimate my walking speed, or rather, overestimate the distance to the train station. The free newspaper I got, for which I thanked the usual woman, looked like two distinguishable papers but was actually one. It wasn't too interesting, so I walked around the station to see familiar faces. I think I recognised the three mid-aged Russian women who look like the Tsar's family in the 19th century, but I am not sure. I can say for sure that I luckily did not meet my former classmate, which prevented uncomfortable situations. It's not that I don't like her, I'm somewhat indifferent towards her, it's just that she bores me and seeing her will force me to spend my precious ride time with her. I was glad to see the usual red haired soldier, I haven't seen her in a few days and was worried. She still had her earphones on, and a newspaper in her hand. As always. Such a classy soldier. "Hello, old friend," I wanted to say, but I have never talked with her. Only closely watched. We get off at the same station, but I walk the stairs while she prefers the escalator. She leaves the station while I have to change trains. It wasn't meant to be.

However, we did not gather around here today to hear about this ride, nor the ride following it to my work place, nor the ride from my work place to Tel Aviv. I shall tell the story of the magical ride from Tel Aviv to my house.

Make yourself a warm cup of tea, sit back and enjoy.

Chapter 1

[Lou Reed – Beginning of a Great Adventure]

Today, as usual, I took the train home after a day at work.

I missed my 17.08 train, so I had to take the next one (17.23). It says it goes to Beer Sheva, but I don't mind because I only need to get off in some Tel Aviv station. In these situations changing has always been tricky because the trains get to the station roughly at the same time. Sometimes I can make it, sometimes I am unlucky. Today I ran really fast all around the station just to see the doors close on me. It was unpleasant to wait another 20 minutes, but as you will see shortly, it was worth it (or was it?).

The train arrived at 17.50 exactly. Many people complain about the train inaccuracy, but I feel the Lord of the Trains has been kind to me. I got on the first wagon, because I sometimes leave small souvenirs there and it's always nice to see them again. Again I was unlucky. The first wagon's seats are placed in a way similar to NY Subway (two long rows of seats), and it's uncomfortable. Therefore

I walked to the other wagon, and searched for a place. I normally start from the upper deck, because of the superior views, and today was no different.

That train was full that day, my dear friends; like sardines in nets did we sit. I walked around and tried to find a spot, as furthest from Mizrahim as I can

Then I saw her. Her name was *train girl*. She was sitting by herself in a 2x2 cubicle, next to the window, facing the direction of the train. Otherwise she might get dizzy and we don't want that. I decided those seats were good enough for me, so I sat across from her, that is, my face opposing the train's direction, and sitting by the aisle. *There, in the train near Tel Aviv University Station, our love story began.*

Chapter 2 [Tim Jones – *She's a Lady* ; Lou Reed and John Cale – *Style It Takes*]

Train Girl wasn't just another train rider. Nor was she just another girl. She was a very special girl; I still cannot decide if she really was a girl, or perhaps a *lady*, or even a *woman*. She seemed to have the *style it takes*. She had hair almost down to her shoulders but not completely, black as an African in a coal mine in a moonless night. Black was also the colour of her nail polish. Even though I normally dislike polished nails, even the girls favourite red one (I find the natural pinkish hue cute), she somehow managed to work it out.

I am afraid I cannot remember her torso, it was cold and one can safely assume she wore some jacket. However I do remember her jeans. It was ripped jeans, the type that was popular a few years ago. But unlike that type, her jeans were completely ripped. It was more white of the fibers than blue of the denim. I don't want to make any mistakes, but I even guessed she did it herself. Just like with the nail polish, I don't care too much for one's trousers, but she had that thing right.

I wouldn't even consider her very beautiful; taking 4 trains a day results in seeing many of the beautiful (soldier-) girls the Holy Land has been blessed with. Even the red haired soldier (c.f. Introduction) seemed better looking than the *Train Girl*. However, as I said, she had that style, that invisible quality dragging you inside. She had *it*. I couldn't not sit in her cubicle, her own little house she built somewhere between Hod HaSharom and Tel Aviv. I didn't want to violate her privacy, of course; I merely wanted to be a guest for a second. A second, nothing more.

She was listening to some music. I followed the white trail of her earphones, from her delicate ears down to the seat next to her, or perhaps it was on her hip. It was an iPhone. At that point I started feeling it wasn't meant to be, as just seconds before I cursed Apple for their products. I accidentally bought an earphones jack for Apple products, and even after soldering I can't quite fit it in my Android.

We sat, and the train left the station.

Chapter 3

[John Cale – Paris 1919]

I was a visitor in her house as the train approached Savidor-Centre. I have always hated that station, I have even been boycotting it for the last year. It seems like such a big, noisy, useless station.

As a hostess and her visitor, we were both somewhat rude. We both had our headphones on and minded our own businesses. I was listening to Patti Smith's *Horses*, and by the way she looked and behaved, I would have not been surprised to learn she had been listening to something similar. No, she wasn't the pop-girl type. She was a different girl. The *Train Girl*, or woman. I still haven't decided.

I was still curious, and wanted to know what exactly she was listening to. Maybe that way we could strike a conversation. But, oh, I couldn't figure it out. And believe me, my dear friends, I have tried. I've tried looking at her phone, amid minding my own. She seemed to be fairly interested in my business as well, but she never spoke a word. *She made me so unsure of myself. Sitting there but never-ever talking (sense).*

Only God knows what has passed in her mind while she was examining the things I had been working on. Was she interested? Did she like it? Or maybe she found it creepy that a man sits in front of her and knits? I don't know. I can tell, however, that her looks were periodic, with a pretty high frequency. Aside from looking at my work, she didn't do much. She mostly looked outside the window (remember the superior views in the upper deck?), or at the table separating between us, between our two lost souls in that huge, moving, metal box.

At one point she was messing with her phone, and for more time than the occasional "next song" click (even though I don't think it was needed, as the picture remained constant, which implies that it wasn't on shuffle). The blue glow on her delicate yet rebellious face was fascinating. She seemed to be working a lot with her fingers, which probably means she was texting someone. Maybe her best friend to tell her about the creep sitting across her? Maybe her father, telling her she was going to be late because she's going to ask some guy out? Maybe her boyfriend? I will never know.

I could never text properly anyway. I see some people use both hands, or use almost all five fingers. I could never do that. I hold my phone in my right hand, and introduce my input with my right thumb. It's slow but effective. She was much faster than me, in that sense.

She held down her phone and continued to look at the commercials outside. Tzipi Livni wants her voice. Is she even eligible to vote?

We arrived at Tel Aviv - HaShalom. Much like the Azrieli Towers next to the station (where the red haired girl's and my ways part every day), I felt I was in a box. Trapped in her magic, unable to move (I was still, however, able to move my fingers enough to continue knitting).

The train was reaching HaShalom Station. It is typically the busiest station, especially at times like those (it was probably around 6 o'clock). I suppose it was very busy then, too. I guess many people walked in and out. Seconds later, I can only assume there were many people walking right by me, maybe looking for a spot, or a piece of paper. I couldn't help them in either ways; our mutual house was full (of love?), and I usually leave the newspaper in the stations, so other people waiting for the train can entertain themselves. A memorable exception was the case of *The Newspaper Soldier-girl*, but that's a completely different story. It seemed to me that *Train Girl* was far superior. She didn't even look at the papers. She lived in a much higher world than the every-day world of newspapers and such.

Or maybe the people were just walking around and thinking to themselves "Oh, such a cute couple". It happened to me once before.

But then again, I can only guess any of these things actually happened. I cannot know for sure, because I wasn't looking. I wasn't interested. I focused solely on God's gift to me, sitting right across from me. My whole attention was concentrated in that small cubicle. *I felt it all.*

As the train was moving I just finished knitting the yellow row, so I thought that should be enough for now.

I put all of the wool and the gigantic hook in my bag. It was difficult to squeeze it in because I had a jacket there, but I managed nonetheless. I opened the other zipper. I hate that zipper. It's been a few months now that it gets very difficult to close it properly, and I'm too lazy to see what's wrong, fix it or replace it. It's not so bad because I don't open it too much, even though it's the main one (strangely I use the second, smaller one more often). However I dislike it when I enter a train station or a mall, and the security guy opens the bag and obviously goes for the main zipper. He opens it, sees there's nothing but some papers, doesn't find the bump caused by the jacket suspicious, tries to close it, fails and just hands me over the half-open bag. Oh well.

I took out a paper pad. I've started using white ones instead of yellow ones. A great call, I think. There was some maths on it. Partial differential equation. I was looking for a harmonic function satisfying a given condition. I seemed to struggle with it in the paper, but then I remembered that I had already found the solution, so I just wrote it again, so I wouldn't forget it. I think *Train Girl* looked at me as I was doing that, and I am not sure as to what it has done to my image in her eyes. Did she like math? Could she understand it? Maybe she could have solved it better than me? I simply don't know.

I took out the pad, and I saw I hadn't filled the whole page with maths, so I still had a few squared centimeters of free space. I started writing about her. About our life together, about her white earphones, her black nails, her ripped jeans, her style. But I didn't want her to understand any of that, of course, that would only make things worse. So I wrote it in *Sütterlinschrift*. I like how my new pen rolls in the high and low letters.

Then I thought to myself, what if we forgot about everything and just loved? Right there, right in the middle of the train, right between HaShalom and HaHagana, right between HaKiryat and Tachana Merkazit. We would forget about everything and just loved each other forever and ever. Just ignore the physical table and the invisible wall separating between us. *Wouldn't it be nice?*

But, ah, it didn't happen. Not this time, not this place. *I couldn't stand it anymore-more.*
An old Yiddish saying goes "שווער צו זיין אַ ייד", namely *it's difficult to be a Jew*. I couldn't agree more.

We arrived at HaHagana.

Chapter 5 [Lou Reed and John Cale – *Small Town* The Velvet Underground – *Some Kinda Love*]

The doors were closing in HaHagana Station. This is the southernmost station within Tel Aviv. I have been thinking for a while now about cycling from my house to HaHagana station every morning and night. That way I would only have to take two trains every day, instead of four. However there are several problems with that; firstly, it'd probably only make my trip longer. Secondly, I don't know where to park my bicycle there so they won't be stolen. Thirdly, the road isn't fun at all, and probably dangerous at night. Fourthly, that way I won't see the red haired soldier.

So instead I take 4 trains and think about life.

When the train passed through that bridge, where you can see a small football stadium to your left (if you're the lovable *Train Girl*; it was to my right because I was facing the other direction), you know you had left Tel Aviv and entered Holon. Holon is a *small town*. It's not like Tel Aviv, the city of sins. Just like almost anything else about her, I don't know what she felt about it; the only sure things I know about her is her physical description given above. I, however, was sad because I knew that outside the city of Tel Aviv things like these never happen.

You can get a girl's phone number just by rolling a conversation starting by her asking for directions (without you even knowing the directions) on Allenby Street, but you can't do that near the Children Museum. It's just not that.

When I saw the football stadium I knew it wasn't meant to be.

I didn't completely give up, though. I still tried. I looked at her, studied her elegant moves. My God, she was a Woman. A woman in a world of girls. I was begging for a miracle. I don't know, she'd drop her bag, I'd pick it up and give it to her. She'd start laughing and I'd ask why. I'd drop my phone and she'd see my wallpaper and ask me about it. Anything.

But things like these just don't happen southern to Levinsky Street. I guess this unrealised love was just going to end like that. It was *some kinda love*, I tell you.

We passed Tzomet Holon Station like it wasn't there. I wouldn't even notice it if not for the vocal announcement. We just kept right on, still that table between us. It looked like a table, but it was much more than that.

We were about mid-way between Tzomet Holon and Holon-Wolfson Stations. She started moving uncomfortably, still with her elegant moves. After a few seconds, she got up.

Chapter 6 *[The Velvet Underground – I'm Sticking with You The Velvet Underground – What Goes On Lou Reed – Sad Song]*

"No," I almost said, "please don't leave me. Not now, not like this. Please, just at least get off at the same station as me so I could walk by you in the stairs. Let me *stick with you*." But she didn't hear my bawl. She didn't listen to my heart. She got up, took her bag and was about to leave just one station before mine.

There are two exit doors, in both ends of the wagon. I couldn't say for sure which one was closer. I can say, however, that she looked at both direction and pondered for a second. We will never know what *went on in her mind* but she decided to walk to the exit door closer to me, so she'd have to walk by me. I swear she swung towards me as she passed by me, never to see me again. I can still feel her jacket rubbed against me. My only physical memory of *The Train Woman*.

I cannot accurately describe what I was thinking as I had an urge to get up too. I put the paper pad in my bag, and had to play a little bit with the zipper for it to work. I got up and started walking towards the exit doors, bypassing all the people who were sitting behind me. I guess there were some physically attractive girls but I didn't care. They didn't have *it* like She did.

"Don't foll yourself," I said to myself, "you're not getting off at this station". I was right. It would have been ridiculous, unheard of. Even though I can probably walk it in 20-30 minutes, we all know I wouldn't talk to her and those minutes will be longer and more painful than the few minutes of waiting for the next stop.

But I still continued walking. I thought that at least I'd be able to see her reaction. She has obviously sensed my existence in the cubicle during that ride, and she obviously knows I didn't get up at the station, so she should be surprised to see me standing by the door, waiting those annoying 5 second until the round button gets a green frame and you can sort of just lay your finger on it, but not really push it, in order to open the doors.

But she didn't notice me. She looked the other way. She was probably so moved by the quality music she was listening to, she lived in her own bubble. A bubble I so wanted to join.

The doors opened, she was maybe the third or fourth person to leave the wagon (despite the fact

that she has been there waiting before them). She turned to her right. I quickly tried to move to the other wagon, with the NY Subway seats, just to get another look of her. But alas, I didn't push those two buttons fast enough, and she was gone. I was left alone in this train and this world.

And I kept thinking.

END

Epilogue *[Madness – Tomorrow's Just Another Day Nico – Chelsea Girls]*

It took me five minutes to get to my station. I quickly ran up the stairs (I was in the last wagon hence closest to the stairs), put my ticket in that machine and quickly passed the electronic gate. Then there was that rotating metal sticks thing, so people would only walk in one direction, and one at a time.

I really hate those things. Ever since I made a balloon thing for someone, walked through that, accidentally putting the balloon in the other third, causing some parts of it to explode. I had to put in some other balloons, but it sucked because I didn't have any more purple balloons so I had to use green ones. She didn't care too much. I am still terrified by the rods of the devil.

This time I made it safely.

I remember when that station was just opened. Before that I had to take a bus to HaHagana, and there would always be so many tourists in that station. I remember the first day I used the station, which was also the opening day. I walked home and on the way I bought a flower for my mother. She thought I was given that at the station, but I actually bought it, because a few days ago I came home with a flower for my grandmother (she lived nearby) for her birthday or anniversary, and my mother thought it was for her and got slightly disappointed.

The whole story made me very sad.

But then I thought it's time to think about the future. I kept telling myself that *tomorrow's another day*, and I might even come across *The Train Woman* again. I will certainly take the later trains from now on. But I know it won't be the same. I was hurt. I don't think I'll do too much talking these days. I've lost a lover, I don't think I'll risk another. At least, *these days*.